

## INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENT FINDS PACE OF LIFE IS SPEEDING UP BY 10 PERCENT

**London, 30 April 2007** An international study measuring the speed of walking in 32 cities around the world reveals that the pace of life is literally getting faster.

Prof Richard Wiseman of the University of Hertfordshire today announced the results of an international study in collaboration with the UK's cultural relations agency, the British Council, to measure the speed of life. Published in his new book – *Quirkology* – the experiment was conducted by British Council researchers who secretly timed thousands of pedestrians' speed of walking in city centres across the globe, including London, Madrid, Singapore, and New York.

A study carried out in the early 1990s demonstrated that pedestrians' speed of walking provides a reliable measure of the pace of life in a city, and that people in fast-moving cities are less likely to help others and have higher rates of coronary heart disease. Using identical methods to those employed in the previous work, the present day research teams discovered that the pace of life is now 10% faster than in the early 1990s.

The biggest changes were found in the Far East, with the pace of life in Guangzhou (China) increasing by over 20%, and Singapore showing a 30% increase, resulting in it becoming the fastest moving city in the study.

Prof. Richard Wiseman said: 'This simple measurement provides a significant insight into the physical and social health of a city. The pace of life in our major cities is now much quicker than before. This increase in speed will affect more people than ever, because for the first time in history the majority of the world's population are now living in urban centres.'

Surprisingly, London ranked outside the top ten, suggesting that many in the capital prefer to live life in the slow lane compared to Copenhagen and Madrid who proved to be the fastest European cities, whilst the Middle East tended to have the slowest pace of life. The results also challenge the notion of the laid back Irish, with Dublin topping the table in the 1990s, and taking fifth place in the present research.

Michael White, Adviser to the British Council Science Department added: 'All the measurements were made on the same day and at the same local time. British Council researchers found a busy street with a wide pavement that was flat, free from obstacles, and sufficiently un-crowded to allow people to walk along at their maximum speed. They timed how long it took 35 men and women to walk along a 60ft stretch of pavement. They only monitored adults who were on their own, and ignored anyone holding a mobile telephone conversation or struggling with shopping bags. Comparing the results with those from the early 1990s revealed that the pace of life is now 10% faster.'

The research teams also visited each of the capital cities within the UK. Londoners are moving the fastest ahead of Belfast and Edinburgh, whilst the slowest walkers are found in Cardiff.

### **Moving too fast for your own good?**

The following questionnaire helps identify people who might be living life too faster. 5 or more 'yes' responses suggests that it might be time to take your foot off the accelerator and slow down.

- 1) Do you seem to glance at your watch more than others?
- 2) When someone takes too long to get to the point, do you feel like hurrying them along?
- 3) Are you often the first person to finish at mealtimes?
- 4) When walking along a street, do you often feel frustrated because you are stuck behind others?
- 5) Would you become irritable if you sit for an hour without doing anything?
- 6) Do you walk out of restaurants or shops if you encounter even a short queue?
- 7) If you are caught in slow-moving traffic, do you seem to get more annoyed than other drivers?

- ENDS -

**For further information or images please contact press officer, Antony Watson, on 020 7389 4872 or email: [antony.watson@britishcouncil.org](mailto:antony.watson@britishcouncil.org)**

**Professor Richard Wiseman is available for interviews and can be contacted on 07790 905219 or email: [r.wiseman@herts.ac.uk](mailto:r.wiseman@herts.ac.uk)**

**For a review copy of *Quirkology* please contact Dusty Miller at Macmillan on 020 7014 6188 or email: [d.miller@macmillan.co.uk](mailto:d.miller@macmillan.co.uk)**

#### **Notes to Editors:**

- The British Council works in 109 countries worldwide to build intercultural understanding between the UK and other countries through the arts, education and training, science and technology, sport, good governance and human rights. For more information, please visit: [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

- *Quirkology* is published by Macmillan on 4th May and explores the curious psychology of everyday life, including love, laughter, and lying. For more information, please visit: [www.quirkology.com](http://www.quirkology.com)
- Methods and Results: All of the research was conducted between 11.30am and 2.00pm local time, on August 22nd 2006. The overall average time taken to cover 60 feet for the 16 countries involved in both surveys fell from 13.76s to 12.49 s. The mean walking times in seconds were as follows:

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| 1) Singapore (Singapore); 10.55s               | 21) Edinburgh (United Kingdom); 13.29s   |
| 2) Copenhagen (Denmark); 10.82s                | 22) Ottawa (Canada); 13.72s              |
| 3) Madrid (Spain); 10.89s                      | 23) Harare (Zimbabwe); 13.92s            |
| 4) Guangzhou (China); 10.94s                   | 24) Sofia (Bulgaria); 13.96s             |
| 5) Dublin (Ireland); 11.03s                    | 25) Taipei (Taiwan); 14.00s              |
| 6) Curitiba (Brazil); 11.13s                   | 27) Cairo (Egypt); 14.18s                |
| 7) Berlin (Germany); 11.16s                    | 28) Sana'a (Yemen); 14.29s               |
| 8) New York (United States of America); 12.00s | 29) Bucharest (Romania); 14.36s          |
| 9) Utrecht (Netherlands); 12.04s               | 30) Dubai (United Arab Emirates); 14.64s |
| 10) Vienna (Austria); 12.06s                   | 31) Damascus (Syria); 14.94s             |
| 11) Warsaw (Poland); 12.07s                    | 32) Amman (Jordan); 15.95s               |
| 12) London (United Kingdom); 12.17s            | 33) Cardiff (United Kingdom); 16.81s     |
| 13) Zagreb (Croatia); 12.20s                   | 34) Bern (Switzerland); 17.37s           |
| 14) Prague (Czech Republic); 12.35s            | 35) Manama (Bahrain); 17.69s             |
| 15) Wellington (New Zealand); 12.62s           | 36) Blantyre (Malawi); 31.60s            |
| 16) Paris (France); 12.65s                     |  |
| 17) Stockholm (Sweden); 12.75s                 |  |
| 18) Ljubljana (Slovenia); 12.76s               |  |
| 19) Tokyo (Japan); 12.83s                      |  |